

The Murder of Pompilia

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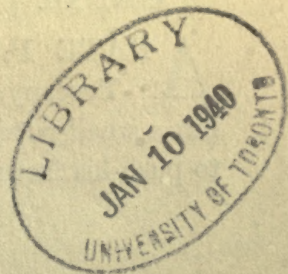




view. The one strongly emerging truth, spite of Mr. Prior's claims for England, spite of Leader Scott's for Como, is the centrality and catholicity of the Church's power in this matter. If we blindly swallow the Comacine theory, or if we accept Mr. Prior's conclusions, or indeed if we attempt a harmony, the one fact that seems undeniably certain is that, had it not been for the Church's European sway, the comparative homogeneity of the growth of Gothic architecture would have been impossible. Search as we may for differences, the similarities are even more striking; and we have still to face the extraordinary fact that in countries of variant race and variant language there grew almost simultaneously and with strangely similar development a common art with a common motive. There were two forces in the world that could override the boundaries of tribe and tongue, and these forces, call them what you will—papal supremacy, monastic rule, art brotherhood, or mason craft—were ultimately no others than Christianity and her handmaid Architecture.

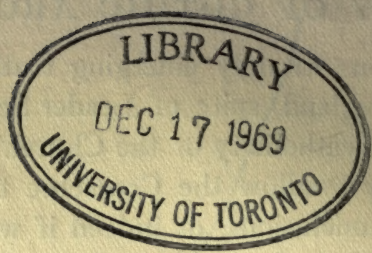
PAUL WATERHOUSE.

*The Murder of Pompeii's*  
 from the "Monthly Review" no 2. 1900  
 1900 - a magazine which had a  
 very brief existence started by the father.  
 Gen. Morison



*copy of Alexander*

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# THE MURDER OF POMPILIA

For the discovery, last January, of the Italian manuscript, of which the following is a translation, I am indebted to Signor Dottore Ignazio Giorgi, Librarian of the Royal Casanatense Library in Rome. The volume from which it is taken [Misc. MS. 2037] is entitled "Varii successi curiosi e degni di esser considerati," and also contains an account of the trial of Beatrice Cenci, and of the recantation, in 1686, of Miguel de Molinos, whose followers are so often mentioned in the "Ring and the Book."

The baptismal dates of the Franceschini and of Caponsacchi are taken from the Archives of Arezzo, which have yielded many other interesting details. Several of the footnotes are based upon the evidence adduced in the trial of Guido Franceschini in January-February 1698, as contained in the actual source of Browning's poem, his "square old yellow book." This is a volume of some 250 pages of Latin and Italian, consisting of eighteen printed pamphlets or legal documents—lawyers' pleas, evidence, &c.—connected with the trial. Browning's unique copy, a translation of which is in progress, is now in the library of Balliol College, Oxford. It has never been republished. The manuscript here printed for the first time has much in common with the information in that book, but supplements it in various ways, and is the best prose account of the whole case which is known to exist.—W. HALL GRIFFIN.

## THE TRIAL AND DEATH OF FRANCESCHINI AND HIS COMPANIONS FOR MURDER AND ASSASSINATION COMMITTED ON THE PERSONS OF PIETRO COMPARINI, HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER, WHICH TOOK PLACE IN THE TIME OF INNOCENT XII.

**A**BATE PAOLO FRANCESCHINI, born in Arezzo, Tuscany, was of noble family, although he had inherited but a small patrimony; yet, being possessed of sufficient talent to push his fortunes, he moved to the city of Rome, where he

was admitted by Cardinal Lauria<sup>1</sup> to his household as Secretary of the Embassy. A natural fitness of mind gained him the favour of this Cardinal, who stood so high in the esteem of the Sacred College for his learning that it seemed by no means improbable that he might be raised to the Pontificate.

Under these favourable auspices, Paolo, who was desirous of making the most of his opportunities, thought of arranging a marriage for his brother Guido, so that he might, by means of a substantial dowry, re-establish the family fortunes. Guido had also found employment in Rome as Secretary of the Embassy to a Cardinal—Cardinal Nerli<sup>2</sup>—but, either because he had not the opportunities or the skill of his brother, he had quitted this service. Now, although Paolo knew that the fact of his brother being out of employment would damage his chances of forming a good alliance, yet he did not cease to try and make an advantageous match, for he hoped that the reflection of his own importance might atone for the shortcomings of his brother.

Guido was now getting towards middle life, of delicate constitution, mediocre appearance, a disposition gloomy rather than pleasing—above all, with very little means, so that his matrimonial expectations would be but slight unless he could profit by his brother's position.

After having sought a number of alliances with people of good position, Paolo finally decided upon Francesca Pompilia, daughter of Pietro and Violante Comparini, because, as she was an only child, and, on account of the age of her parents

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Lorenzo Brancati di Lauria, born 1612, made Cardinal 1681, died November 30, 1693. He would be an excellent patron, being widely known for his learning, modesty, and liberality. I find Paolo, then aged thirty-three, dedicating a poem to him in 1683—doubtless the first step toward securing the Cardinal's favour. Cardinal Lauria secured fifteen votes at the Conclave which in 1689 elected Alexander VIII., the predecessor of the "Pope" of Browning's poem.

<sup>2</sup> Guido seems indeed to have missed his opportunity. Nerli was literary, very wealthy, and, like the Franceschini, a Tuscan—from Florence. Born 1636, made Cardinal 1673, he died, aged seventy-two, in 1708. Browning was not aware of the *names* of either Lauria or Nerli.

there was no possibility of other offspring, she would succeed to 12,000 scudi held in trust; and Paolo hoped to make the match without difficulty, as the Comparini were rather beneath him than his equals by birth.

There was a female hairdresser<sup>1</sup> who used to visit the Comparini with that freedom with which such women are admitted by those who desire to appear to their husbands more beautiful than they are, and are tolerated by those men who hold too high an opinion of the fidelity of their wives. Paolo considered this woman the most likely means of forwarding his matrimonial schemes. Guido, therefore, repeatedly went to the woman's shop [in the Piazza Colonna] on various pretexts, and, having won his way into her confidence, he occasionally turned the conversation upon the subject of his marrying, whereupon she told him, one day, that he might easily approach the daughter of the Comparini, who had a dowry worthy of him, as she had the expectation of inheriting the trust-money, and also had few kinsfolk, these being the conditions of which he was in search. It was agreed, therefore, that, if she should succeed in bringing about the match, he would pay her 200 scudi.

The hairdresser lost no time in opening the subject to Violante, who, being anxious that her daughter should succeed to the property, and also that she should be advantageously settled, agreed to speak to her husband, whose consent she felt disposed to obtain, should the facts be as they were represented. Violante spoke of the matter to Pietro, and he consented to entertain the proposal on condition of the verification of the wealth boasted of by the Franceschini, who, said he, must furnish a written statement attested by well-known people.

The hairdresser informed the Franceschini of this, and they sent for an account of their real estate in Arezzo, amounting to an annual income of 1700 scudi, this statement being certified

<sup>1</sup> This "woman-dealer in perukes" figures in the poem of "Tertium Quid" (430-51), where the bribe promised her is put at the modest sum of 20 zecchines, *i.e.* £10, as against the 200 scudi—nearly £200 of modern money—mentioned here.



by people known to the Comparini, and also confirmed by them by word of mouth.

Abate Paolo, fearing lest the fortune should slip through his fingers, did not wish to allow the Comparini time to change their minds; on the contrary, in order to make sure of things, he desired to strengthen his position by the influence of Cardinal Lauria, his patron, by whom he had a marriage contract drawn up, his Eminence being pleased to show his interest in the welfare of a man whom he regarded with a certain degree of favour.

Meanwhile Pietro Comparini, having made inquiries as to the social condition and the property of the Franceschini, found a state of affairs very different from that represented, both in regard to their rank and their possessions. Thereupon he had warm disputes with his wife, who persisted in urging the marriage, and said that he had taken the advice of people who were envious of the welfare of both families, and wished to hinder the good fortune of the two households; and that therefore they ought not to depart from their first intention, for she was quite sure, from several truthful witnesses, that the Franceschini were of the first nobility in Arezzo, and not of the second, as was stated, and that the wealth mentioned in the written statement was exactly as declared. But the warmer her interest became, the more that of Pietro cooled down; for, having an eye to his own interest, if he could not gain, at least he did not wish to lose by the marriage of his daughter. But what does not a man lose when he allows himself to be ruled by women! He loved his wife so tenderly, that from the first day of his union with her he had made her the arbitress of his will: notwithstanding this, however, Violante, fearing that, in a matter of such importance, Pietro might rather be guided by good advice than yield to her flattery, and not being able to endure any delay in making sure of the trust-money—which would go to another family if the Comparini lacked descendants—she resolved to complete the marriage without the knowledge of Pietro. So, having obtained the consent of her

daughter, who was always amenable to her commands, and having arranged matters with Guido, one morning she took Pompilia, suitably dressed, to San Lorenzo in Lucina, their parish church, and gave her in marriage.<sup>1</sup>

This was a heavy blow to Pietro, but, realising that there was no remedy for it, he concealed his wrath by pretending that he had only been displeased at not having been at the marriage, and that this was forgotten in the pleasure of the wedding feast which was held at his house (in the Via Vittoria). For dowry, he made over to his daughter twenty-six bonds, with the ultimate succession to them all: and that very day, as they were talking of the advantages which would result to both households from the union of their interests, it was arranged that the Comparini should go to Arezzo; and this took place a few days later,<sup>2</sup> the administration of all the property being left absolutely in the hands of Guido. On their arrival in Arezzo the Comparini were received by the mother and the relations of the Franceschini with all those marks of affection which are usual on such occasions; but very speedily, as they saw more of one another, they passed into quarrels, and from these to acts of open hostility. The mother of Guido,<sup>3</sup> a proud, niggardly woman, who kept house in a penurious style, and despotically limited even the bare necessities of life, provoked the Comparini to complain, and their remonstrances were answered at first by words of contempt and then by threats. Violante, being a woman with her own share of natural pride, could not endure this, and therefore began to worry Pietro, and curse the day on which he had decided to go to Arezzo, laying upon him the whole blame for that for which she herself

<sup>1</sup> The real date of the marriage is August or September 1693. Browning, for artistic reasons, places it in December—"one dim end of a December day"—on account of the gloom associated with it.

<sup>2</sup> This would be in November 1693, early in the month.

<sup>3</sup> Guido's mother was Beatrice Romani, a woman of sixty-two in 1693, as she was born in 1631. She died, aged seventy, in 1701, three years after her son's execution.

was responsible! Pietro, who was one of those men who are beside themselves if a woman sheds a couple of tears, instead of reproaching her as the cause of the trouble, in that she had, against his will and without his knowledge, concluded the marriage, begged her with caresses to bear this ill-usage with patience, as it would perhaps cease when the Franceschini saw that their daughter sided with them.

At this time Cardinal Lauria died [November 30, 1693], a Cardinal whose merits were beyond all praise, and Abate Paolo was appointed Secretary in Rome of the Order of the Knights of St. John of Malta,<sup>1</sup> and this increased the proud bearing of the Franceschini to such a degree that they now considered that the Comparini should deem themselves fortunate to be among their friends, much more their relations.

Violante, who could not endure to live any longer under the proud sway of another woman, when she had been accustomed to command, had now quite regained the upper hand with her husband, and so worried him that she induced him to go back to Rome once more, and to this end the Franceschini supplied them with money sufficient for the journey, and for the furniture necessary for the house.<sup>2</sup>

But scarcely were they arrived in Rome than, to the amazement of everybody, it was reported that Pietro had issued a judicial monition, in which he declared that Francesca Pompilia was not really his daughter, and that therefore he was not bound to pay the dowry. This document was certified by Violante, his wife, who deposed that, in order to keep off her husband's creditors in regard to the deed of trust, and to enjoy the interest of the bonds, she had feigned to be with child, and that her deception should not be perceived by her husband,

<sup>1</sup> This was a good appointment. The headquarters of the Knights in Rome was in the still existing building in the Via Condotti, close to the Piazza di Spagna. The home of the Comparini was close by.

<sup>2</sup> The Comparini returned in March 1694 to their former home in the Via Vittoria. Browning represents them as going to another house in the Via Paolina, erroneously associated with the road at the south of Rome leading to the church of S. Paolo *fuori le mura*.

she had agreed with him that if ever this should happen they should have rooms apart until the birth of the child. She took the opportunity of the absence of Pietro, when busy over his lawsuits one day, to bring about the appearance of the child. All passed off successfully owing to the sagacity of a nurse with whom she had arranged to provide all that was needful. Accordingly, in order that the man-servant should have no suspicion as to the fraud, they sent him off to the chemist's to have some prescriptions made up, and, during his absence, away went the nurse to fetch a child which she had brought into the world the day before for a neighbour, with whom she had made previous arrangements to this effect. Having got back to the house, she called through the open window to an acquaintance of the Comparini, everything being so neatly arranged that when the neighbour arrived there remained nothing to be done but to make her believe what was not really the fact.<sup>1</sup>

This unexpected act of Pietro's was noised abroad in Rome like wildfire, and was listened to with no less amazement than displeasure, and the Franceschini, who were justly indignant, would have taken fitting vengeance had not their anger been tempered by the hope that, if Pompilia were not really and legitimately the child of Pietro and Violante, the marriage might be annulled, and their injured reputation thus reinstated. But, having taken the advice of a number of lawyers, and finding that their opinions differed, they did not wish to stake their chances upon an issue so doubtful; for, if they instituted legal proceedings, they must inevitably acknowledge and presuppose the illegitimacy, and by such a confession they would themselves remain prejudiced in their claims upon the dowry. They therefore opposed the judicial notice of Violante and

<sup>1</sup> These events took place on July 17, 1680, as the baptismal entry in S. Lorenzo in Lucina proves. It runs as follows: "Die 23 Julii 1680 Ego Bartholomæus Minius Curatus baptizavi infantem natam 17 hujus ex D. Petro Comparini et ex D. Violante Peruzzi conjugibus degentibus in hac Parocchia, cui nomen impositum fuit Francisca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia." (*Cf.* the opening lines of the poem "Pompilia.")

obtained a decision to the effect that Pompilia was so far to be regarded as the Comparini's daughter that the bonds promised in the marriage settlement were to be transferred to her. But Pietro appealed from this decision to the *Signatura di Giustizia* [the Court of Appeal].

The chief sufferer from this hatred between the two families was the unfortunate Pompilia, who remained by herself at Arezzo, exposed to the arbitrary treatment of her husband, her mother-in-law, and the Franceschini kindred, all of whom were mortally offended with her parents, so that not an hour passed without her being threatened with death. In a situation so desperate the heart of any woman, even of one more experienced, would have sunk within her, much more that of a girl of sixteen who had no share in the deceit of her mother nor in the wiles of her father, and who, by reason of her good qualities, was worthy of caresses and not of cruelty.

The unfortunate girl bore up as long as she could under their tyrannies, which daily became worse and worse, but, seeing that all prospect of peace was hopeless, she fled several times to the Governor of Arezzo<sup>1</sup> to seek the interposition of his authority with the Franceschini; and, as he gave her no help, she cast herself at the feet of the Bishop,<sup>2</sup> who summoned Guido to his presence and reconciled them. But, as Guido's anger was increased by reason of such public appeals, he threatened her with certain death if ever she should do such a thing again.

The wretched girl, seeing every avenue of peace closed,

<sup>1</sup> This, as the poem mentions, was Vincenzo Marzi-Medici, governor from 1693-95. Pompilia went to him in 1694, and he wrote a letter to Abate Paolo in Rome, giving him an account of the Comparini and their doings in Arezzo, dated August 2, 1694. Marzi-Medici was not, however, as the poem says, a relative of the Grand Duke; he was the son of a Florentine lawyer.

<sup>2</sup> This Bishop—*Archbishop* the poem calls him—was Giovanni Matteo Marchetti, Bishop for thirteen years, from 1691-1704. He was of a well-known Pistoian family, and had a splendid collection of drawings by old masters, which came to England after his death.

implored the help of Canon Conti,<sup>1</sup> brother-in-law of the Franceschini, who was perfectly familiar with what she had had to suffer, as he used to visit the house; and she begged him to save her life, which was in continual peril. He was moved to pity, and, knowing that there was no remedy but flight—in which, however, he could personally take no part, lest he should bring upon himself the hatred of the whole family connection—he suggested that the only person for such an enterprise was Canon Caponsacchi,<sup>2</sup> his personal friend, and in a remote degree related to him—a man whose spirit was no less apt to incur danger than to overcome it.

Pompilia having accepted the advice of Conti, he lost no time in opening the subject to Caponsacchi, who, when the matter was first broached, manifested repugnance towards aiding a wife to flee from her husband, even though the only object in view was to accompany her to the home of her parents. But, on being fully informed as to the unbearable ill-treatment of Guido and his family, pity overcame every other feeling, and he accepted the undertaking. Pompilia, who now longed for this result, kept urging it upon him by means of letters<sup>3</sup> and endearing incitements, always, however, preserving her fidelity as a wife, as may be gathered from her letters, in some of which she praises the modesty of Caponsacchi, and in others reproves him for having sent her some rather unbecoming verses, and begs him to preserve unsullied that good character which she has praised.

The day of the flight having been arranged,<sup>4</sup> these two, with the assistance of Conti, got into a carriage, and, travelling as fast as possible—never stopping except when needful to change

<sup>1</sup> Guido's only sister Porzia married Count Aldobrandini, Conti's brother.

<sup>2</sup> Caponsacchi was aged twenty-four at this time (1697), having been baptized March 22, 1673.

<sup>3</sup> Twenty-two such letters, or fragments of them, were said to have been found by Guido, and were produced in the evidence at his trial. They are of slight interest.

<sup>4</sup> They fled on Sunday, April 28, "seven hours after sunset"—*i.e.* about 2 A.M. Browning artistically alters this to April 23—St. George's Day.

horses—they arrived, the second morning at dawn, at Castelnovo. Here, although the landlord got ready one bed for both, Pompilia rested in a chair and Caponsacchi rushed down to the stable to hurry up the driver.

Guido waked up some hours after Pompilia had departed, and, finding that she was not in bed, got up in a passion; and seeing her jewel-case open and the jewels gone, together with some money which was kept there, he divined what had taken place. So he tore along the road to Rome on a good horse, and overtook the fugitives at the inn at Castelnovo<sup>1</sup> one hour after they had arrived.

When she saw him appear, Pompilia, with a boldness such as despair frequently produces even in a sluggish nature, seized the sword of Caponsacchi, which was lying on a table, and, having drawn it, rushed out to meet Guido; and calling him a traitor and a tyrant, threatened his life; but he, fearing that her boldness no less than the valour of Caponsacchi—whom he had not previously known to be her protector—might result rather in his own death than in his taking vengeance, turned his horse's head, and, rushing off to the magistrate, had them arrested and soon afterwards taken off to the New Prisons [in Rome, sixteen miles distant], where they were accused of the flight and then of adultery.

Abate Paolo, who, as has been said, was Secretary in Rome for the Knights of Malta, made urgent representations to the Pope concerning the injury to his honour, and besought the Governor of Rome, Monsignor Pallavicino,<sup>2</sup> protesting that he ought to give judgment against Caponsacchi for having eloped with his sister-in-law, and declare them both guilty of adultery, and that on this account his brother Guido ought to obtain possession of the whole dowry.

Legal proceedings were instituted with all the rigour of the

<sup>1</sup> The inn still exists unchanged, with the very room in which the scene here described took place.

<sup>2</sup> Marc Antonio Venturini, mentioned as Governor in the poem, was in fact a Deputy-Governor for criminal cases—*Locum tenens in criminalibus*.

law, but there appeared no evidence of guilt against Pompilia and Caponsacchi except the letters indicating an affectionate intercourse, and written while the flight was being planned, the flight itself, and the deposition of the driver,<sup>1</sup> who said that he had several times seen them, as he turned round while driving, face to face together—*i.e.* cheek against cheek—a thing which is no proof of wrongdoing, while the roughness of the roads, and the speed at which they were driving, by shaking them, might have been the cause. Wherefore the Court prudently sentenced Caponsacchi to three years' relegation in Civita Vecchia for his rash act in running away with a wife from the home of her husband, even though he had been actuated by motives of pity.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile the proceedings against Pompilia continued, and with the consent of the Franceschini she was sent under restraint to the monastery of the Scalette in the Lungara,<sup>3</sup> Guido giving a bond that he would pay for her board. After some time it became evident that she was *enceinte*, and as the rules of the place did not allow of her remaining any longer there, the Governor of Rome, with the approval of Abate Paolo, who held a power of attorney for his brother, issued an order that Pompilia should be removed to the house of the Comparini, her parents, under security of 300 scudi, declaring at the same time that the obligation on Guido's part to pay for her board should cease the very day on which Pompilia should leave the monastery.<sup>4</sup>

This suit, in which the Franceschini represented themselves as being solely actuated by a desire to repair their honour, was recognised as having for its chief motive their greed for money,

<sup>1</sup> This was Francesco Borsi, called "Venerino," a servant of the landlord of the still existing *Canale* Inn at Arezzo. He drove them to Camoscia, that is, for the first night only.

<sup>2</sup> This decree is dated September 24, 1697.

<sup>3</sup> The Scalette—so called from the steps in front of it—still exists, under the name of the "Buon Pastore." Browning chose to speak of the Convertite, who also had a home in the Lungara.

<sup>4</sup> This order is dated October 12, 1697.



so that there was not a single club in which the conduct of both sides was not criticised. For this reason the Knights of St. John quietly hinted to Abate Paolo that he had better resign his position as Secretary. The loss of so honourable a position gave free course to the malice of the tongues of his enemies, and reduced the mind of Paolo to such a state of anxiety that he felt ashamed to face even his dearest friends. He therefore decided to quit Rome and to pass to a land whither there should never come news of the dishonour which had so deeply afflicted him.<sup>1</sup>

Guido being informed of his departure and of the obligation now resting upon himself of repairing the honour of their house, reflected that if he, like his brother, should voluntarily exile himself, it would be regarded as a confirmation of that cowardliness of spirit with which he had been justly charged when he had overtaken his wife in her flight and had not then and there taken that vengeance which was expected at his hands.

Her time having arrived, Pompilia gave birth to a male child,<sup>2</sup> whom the Comparini sent out to nurse. Everybody thought, and in particular Violante, that this event would dispose Guido, by the very force of nature, to a reconciliation with his wife, while the minds of the Comparini, in spite of their declaration that Pompilia was not their child, might also be inclined to re-establish peace. The thought of Guido, however, was wholly different, for he was ceaselessly urged on by Paolo, who, even though absent, kept plotting to blot out of the world every memory of his own dishonour by the death of Pompilia, Pietro, and Violante.

Guido had a field labourer, a bold man of evil life, to whom he repeatedly told exaggerated tales about the disgrace which his wife and the Comparini had brought upon his house; and he confided to this man that, if he would aid him, he would be able to wipe out with their blood the stains upon his honour.

<sup>1</sup> I have traced him to Prague, where he published a poem in 1699.

<sup>2</sup> A boy, Gaetano, born December 18, 1697.

The assassin at once agreed, and himself suggested that, if other help were needed, he had three or four friends for whom he could vouch. Guido's answer was that he should select three bold and trusty ones for the sake of security, in case of meeting with resistance, and that he should be particularly careful to engage them at as low a rate as he possibly could.

This being all arranged, and the weapons suitable for such a deed made ready, Guido with his four companions, disguised, and with changed garments, took the road to Rome, and arrived<sup>1</sup> at the house of the Comparini<sup>2</sup> two hours after sunset. One of them knocked at the door, and when Pietro answered, the assassin said that he had a letter to deliver from Civita Vecchia from Caponsacchi. When the women heard this, they told Pietro that he must tell the man to come back in the morning, and objected to his opening the door; but Pietro being curious about the news from Caponsacchi, and the assassin making reply that he could not call again next morning, as he had to depart that very night, Pietro opened the fatal door through which entered death for himself, for Violante, and for Pompilia.

Beside himself with passion, Guido was the first to rush in with two companions<sup>3</sup>—the other two remaining to keep guard—and, having repeatedly stabbed the poor old man, they deprived him of life before he could utter a word. Scarcely had the unfortunate women beheld this than they were thrust through in a similar manner and experienced the same fate; the blows of Guido being directed against the unhappy Pompilia, and being accompanied with innumerable insults. After having trampled her under foot several times and

<sup>1</sup> They arrived at Rome December 24, 1697. The murders took place on Thursday, January 2, 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Browning places this outside Rome beyond the Porta S. Paolo; the murders actually took place in a house—since rebuilt—which stood at the corner of the Via Vittoria and the Via Babuino, formerly called Via Paolina.

<sup>3</sup> These two were Francesco Pasquino and Alessandro Giovanni Baldeschi. Those who kept guard were Biaggio Agostinelli and Domenico Gambassini.

repeated his blows, Guido, not sure that his fury had accomplished its purpose, told his companions to see if she were really dead, and one of them lifting her up by the hair and then letting her suddenly fall, made sure that she was no longer alive.

The barbarous slaughter over, and Guido having paid the cut-throats the money agreed upon,<sup>1</sup> he wished to separate from them, but they would not allow either him or any of the others to depart, fearing lest one should kill the other, as not infrequently happens in such crimes. Or, perchance, the cut-throats had arranged with their leader, if they kept together, to kill Guido, supposing that he would have upon him a large sum of money, and therefore, it is said, they would not consent to his going away. Accordingly they took the road to Arezzo together, being obliged to travel on foot on account of not having been able to procure post-horses.

Life was totally extinct in Pietro and Violante by reason of their numerous wounds, but Pompilia was still living, although her wounds were even more numerous,<sup>2</sup> for in her innocence, and aided by Divine mercy, she had been able to feign death so well that she deceived the assassins. When, therefore, she could see that they were gone, collecting her dying breath, she had still sufficient strength of voice to make the neighbours hear her cries for help.

Being found in a dying state, the needs of the soul were first eagerly attended to, and afterwards those of her body. Her wounds were so many in number, and of such a character, that, although they did not immediately deprive her of life, yet they rendered her death inevitable; an event which, to the universal sorrow of those who attended her, and of as many as had information about so lamentable a case, took place a few days later.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This account differs on this point from that used by Browning, who says the assassins were *not* paid, and therefore were about to kill Guido.

<sup>2</sup> Twenty-two dagger wounds, five deadly.

<sup>3</sup> Pompilia died on Monday, January 6, 1698, the day on which she is supposed to speak in the poem.

The constancy with which she endured the sufferings of her medical treatment was no less amazing than the love excited by her resignation to the Divine will; while not only did she not blame the cruelty of her husband, but with fervent prayers she implored God to pardon him.

As evidence of the compassion of those who ministered to her soul and to her body, I quote the following sworn testimonies, not only as to her innocence, but also as to the happy passage of her pure soul to heaven.

#### TESTIMONIES AS TO THE AFORESAID STATEMENT.

I, the undersigned Barefoot Augustinian, solemnly testify that, having ministered to Signora Pompilia from the first moment of the woful case until the last minute of her life, I state and swear, as I am a priest in the presence of that God who shall be my Judge, that I have remarked and have been amazed at the innocent and pure conscience of this ever-blessed girl; and in the four days [Jan. 2-6] which she survived, she, having been exhorted by me to pardon [her husband], replied with tears in her eyes, and with calm and compassionate voice, "May Jesus pardon him as I have already done with all my heart." But what was most wonderful was that, although she suffered great pain from her injuries, I never heard her utter an offensive or an impatient word, or even give any sign of such, either against God or her fellow-beings; but with uniform submission to the Divine will she would say, "The Lord have mercy on me"; a fact, in truth, which is incompatible with a spirit not closely united to God; and such union does not take place in a single moment, but truly is due to long-continued habit. Moreover, I declare that I have uniformly noticed her to be most modest; and in particular on those occasions in which the doctors attended to her, so that, if she had not been of good habits, on such occasions she would not have given evidence of modesty in regard to certain little details carefully noticed by me, and much wondered at, that a young girl should

be able to bear herself in the presence of so many men with such modesty and composure as did this saintly girl, even though half dead. And if we are to believe what the Holy Spirit, speaking by the mouth of the Evangelist, says, in the 7th chapter of St. Matthew, *arbor mala non potest bonos fructus facere*, noticing that he says, “non potest [*i.e. can* not], and not “non facit,” [*i.e. does* not]:—that is, he pronounces it impossible to translate our powers into acts of perfection when these forces are themselves imperfect and tainted with evil—we must perforce say that this girl was full of goodness and modesty, since with all ease and perfection she behaved virtuously and modestly during the close of her life. Moreover, she died full of faith in God, her heart filled with Divine grace, and with all the sacraments of the Church, so that all who were in her presence were filled with wonder and pronounced her a saint. I say no more for fear that I may be taxed with being partial. I know full well that *Solus Deus est scrutator cordium*: but I know also that *ex abundantia cordis os loquitur*, and that my own Augustine declares, *Talis vita, finis ita*: wherefore, having remarked in this ever-blessed girl devout words, virtuous deeds and most modest acts, and a death in the fear of God, for the satisfaction of my own conscience I am obliged, and can do no other than declare that it must needs be that she has ever been a young girl good, modest, and honourable.

The above is my testimony, whereof in my own handwriting, this 10th day of January —.

[Signed] FRA CELESTINE DI S. ANNA,<sup>1</sup>

*Barefoot Augustinian.*

<sup>1</sup> From this name Browning has constructed a wholly imaginary “Hospital of St. Anna,” in which Pompilia is supposed to die after Fra Celestine—who is often mentioned in the poem—has confessed her. These depositions supplied the poet with the suggestion for his conception of an idealised Pompilia, and it was mainly in allusion to them that he is reported to have said, “I assure you that I found her, just as she speaks and acts in my poem, in that old book.”

## AFFIDAVIT SIGNED BY SEVERAL WITNESSES.

We, the undersigned, having been asked to state the truth, give full and incontrovertible testimony under oath, that on the occasions on which we were present and rendered assistance in the last illness from which Francesca Pompilia died, she having been several times questioned by priests and others as to whether she had committed any offence against Guido her husband, which would have afforded him reason to ill-treat her in the manner we saw, and cause her to be done to death; she uniformly replied that she had not at any time committed any such fault whatever, and had always lived in all chastity and purity. And this we know through having been present during her sufferings; and from having heard all the said questions and answers; and also from having treated her medically and aided her; and from having heard her replies to the aforesaid questions during the four days that she survived while suffering from her wounds, and from having seen her, and heard her, and witnessed her die like a saint.

In evidence whereof, &c.

This 10th day of January

I, NICOLO CONSTANTIO, who took part in the medical treatment.

I, PLACIDO SARDI, priest, with my own hand confirm what Fra Celestine has said above, having been present as above.

I, MICHELE NICOLO GREGORIO, confirm the above.

I, GIUSEPPE D'ANDILLI, with my own hand, &c.

I, DOMENICO GODYN, &c.

I, LUCA CORSI, &c.

I, GIO. BATTISTA GUTEUS.<sup>1</sup>

I, GIO. BATTISTA MUCHA.

<sup>1</sup> Guiteus was an apothecary who administered medicine and helped in the medical treatment. Mucha was his assistant.

I, Abate Liberato Barberito, Doctor of Theology, hereby give full and indubitable evidence that, having been summoned to attend the death-bed of the late Signora Francesca Pompilia Comparini, I repeatedly noticed, and in particular during one entire night, how she bore with Christian resignation the pains of her wounds, and with more than human generosity pardoned the wrongs done her by him who had so cruelly caused her death. Thus, during the whole of the aforesaid night I observed the tenderness of her conscience, the time having passed in affording me evidence that her everyday life had been full of heroic Christian perfection. And I can testify from the experience which I have had, during the four years in which I was Judge of the Ecclesiastical Court of the late Archbishop of Monopoli, that I have never seen any one meet death in such a state of mind, especially when this had been due to violence.

Wherefore, in evidence, &c.,

This 10th day of January 1698,

I, ABATE LIBERATO BARBERITO.

All these sworn testimonies form part of the evidence in the suit against Guido,<sup>1</sup> and are signed and confirmed by the above-mentioned witnesses who took part in ministering to the bodily and spiritual needs of Pompilia until her death.

Divine justice, which will not suffer so atrocious a crime to pass unpunished, brought it about that the evil-doers were overtaken at dawn by the police at the New [Merluzza]<sup>2</sup> Inn [at Baccano], some few miles from Rome; where, after a scanty meal, overcome with the fatigue of their journey and with sleep, they had lain down to rest by the fire. The police suddenly rushed in, and pointing their carbines at the heads of the offenders, they were seized and bound.

They were removed at once to the New Prisons [in the Via

<sup>1</sup> All three, together with some additional matter, are printed in the "book" which the poet bought.

<sup>2</sup> The name is omitted in the Roman MS. I supply it from another source.

Giulia, Rome], and the Governor of Rome informed the Pope of the barbarous murder and of the arrest of the guilty; he issued orders that there should be no delay in proceeding against them with all the rigour of the law, this being a case which, by reason of the consequences that might ensue, the Court was bound to examine with the most scrupulous attention.

Far less than had been imagined, however, was it found needful to apply torture to ensure the confession of the assassins and of Guido, who more emphatically than the others persisted in denying his guilt. Notwithstanding this, simply at the sight of the torture his heart failed him and he made a full confession, although he declared that he had been actuated in his crime by no other motive than the desire to make reparation for his honour, which had been so publicly injured—a thing which any man, even if of ignoble birth, would undertake, much more one like himself, who was of good family; and that, if in his first examination he had denied the truth of this, he had done it solely so as not to prejudice his companions who had helped him in a deed worthy of all indulgence, because their only motive had been honour.

With the confession of Guido and its ratification by the others the trial was at an end, and sentence was given,<sup>1</sup> the assassins being condemned to the gallows and Guido to the *mannaia* [a kind of guillotine], an instrument of death conceded to him rather out of respect to his having taken minor religious orders than for other reasons.

The written arguments of [Desiderius Spreti] the Advocate, and [Hyacinthus de Arcangelis] the Procurator of the Poor, in their defence on the plea of honour were so able that there is no mention of more learned pleadings;<sup>2</sup> but the charges against

<sup>1</sup> The Court gave sentence on Tuesday, February 18. The lawyers for the defence, however, appealed to the Pope, who signed the death-warrant on Friday, February 21—the day on which Innocent XII. is supposed, in the poem, to utter his noble monologue.

<sup>2</sup> The pleadings here alluded to are those contained in the poet's "square old yellow book." The two pleas by Spreti were especially commended for their learning. As *Advocate of the Poor* he was the leading lawyer for the



the accused were so numerous, and each of them punishable by death, that they were overpowered no less by the character than by the number of these. The bearing of deadly arms of prohibited shape; the killing of Pietro and Violante, who had not been accomplices in the flight of Pompilia; the fact of the murders having taken place *in lite pendente*, in the home of the Comparini, which, with the consent of Guido, the Court had assigned to Pompilia as a secure place of confinement; and many other accusations of weight, brought into prominence the profound learning of the counsel for the defence and the justice of the condemnation of the guilty.

Although, with the usual hope of all who know themselves guilty of a crime punishable with death, Guido had flattered himself that he should be able to save his life on the plea of honour; yet, when the unexpected condemnation was pronounced, he did not yield himself up to such ill-regulated manifestations as for the most part occur among those who pass through so terrible an experience. He remained like one dazed; then, after some moments, he heaved a deep sigh, accompanied by a few tears, which by their extraordinary size indicated mortal symptoms, and exclaimed: "Verily I feared a heavy sentence, but not that of death. My offence is great, but my love of honour has never allowed me to see it in its true light until now, when it has been adjudged by justice, for which I have so profound a veneration that I do not wish to appeal even to God, to whom alone I turn as the sole source of mercy. Except by the will of God, I should never have come to this awful pass, and this I desire should be a source of comfort to me, and not of pain, so that, by my utter resignation to His will, I may acquire some claim to Divine pardon." And hereupon he cast himself into the arms of the Frati and showed such signs of lively contrition that his prayers were accompanied by their tears rather than by their exhortations.

defence; Arcangeli, who wrote three pleas, being one of his *Procurators*. The poet, for reasons of his own, has chosen to make Spreti the "junior" of Arcangeli. The eleven pleas in the trial are all in Latin.

The four accomplices did not by any means dispose themselves for death with the same resignation; for, as their mental capacity was in keeping with their viler nature, they could not be persuaded of the justice of their condemnation. The oldest and the youngest<sup>1</sup> were the most firm in their obstinacy; the former because his heart had been hardened by so many years of evil life, the latter because he felt so bitterly the dreadful punishment for this his first crime, committed in the flower of his youth, he having also shed not a drop of blood, his only offence being that he had been induced to keep guard at a door by which Guido had to pass that he might wipe away with the blood of his enemies the stains upon his honour.

The nearer the hour of execution approached, the more the obstinacy of these two unfortunate men increased, so that the Frati were, so to say, in despair about their repentance; when Divine mercy, which accomplishes wonders even when they are least expected, penetrated their hearts, and thus gave glorious evidence of its omnipotence. Finally, they yielded to God, and the memory of their offences which had hitherto rendered them obstinate became, under the illumination of Divine grace, the means of disposing them to repentance and of fitting them for absolution.

These souls being secured to God after so prolonged a struggle, the procession started from the New Prisons of Tor di Nonna to the scaffold, which was set up in the Piazza del Popolo in view of the city gate and the Corso. In the middle was the block on a high platform, made much broader than usual, and having carefully arranged steps leading up to it; the gallows being placed, one on each side, at equal distances. Vast as is the area of the Piazza, there was not a single foot which was not occupied with raised stands, and these, being draped with tapestry and other decorations, formed a theatre suited rather for festive games than for a solemn tragedy.

His four companions preceded Guido, each in a separate cart, attended, as usual, by the pious Frati, and followed by a

<sup>1</sup> This, as far as I can discover, was Biaggio Gambassini.

huge crowd of people, who prayed that they might have a blessed end, of which, to judge by their contrite resignation, there seemed a sure and certain hope.

Guido Franceschini hardly ever took his eyes from the crucifix, except when nature became faint from his continued gaze, and then he turned away his head, but not his heart, which being wholly given to his Creator, there remained no portion for himself. Arriving at the Piazza di Pasquino, the tumbrils halted before the church of the Agonizzanti, where it is customary to expose the Host and to bestow the Benediction upon condemned criminals on the day of their execution. Guido here fell upon his knees and recited, in a voice clearly audible to the bystanders, several verses of the *Miserere*, among them this: "Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities" [Psalm li. 9], accompanying his words with such demonstrations of sorrow and repentance that the people, in tears, manifested as much grief as the condemned man. Guido's companions received the Benediction with similar devotion; but the behaviour of the youngest was unprecedented: beside himself with love to God, his words were like those of one inspired, so that the priests, with all their learning, were filled with humility.

Thence, through the most inhabited streets, they continued their way to the Piazza del Popolo, where all suffered death, Guido being the last.<sup>1</sup> They exhibited the same signs of

<sup>1</sup> This was on Saturday, February 22, 1698. The Guido of the poem was then aged fifty; the Guido of history was a man of forty, who had married at thirty-five. Abate Paolo, the "second son" of the poem, was really the eldest son and Guido's senior by some eight years; while

"The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo,  
Priest, Canon,"

was born four years after Paolo. The dates in the baptismal register of the Pieve church are: October 28, 1650, Paolo; January 2, 1653, Porzia; August 5, 1654, Girolamo; and on January 14, 1657 [1658 N.S.], Guido di Tommaso di Girolamo Franceschini e di Beatrice di Guido Romani sua consorte. The Guido of history was therefore not the "Head of the House," nor was he a Count. The family seems at that date to have belonged to the *fourth* of the eight "degrees of nobility" distinguished in Arezzo. A certain Count Giacomo—Jacobus Comes

contrition as they had shown while being prepared for death; and just as the youngest had given special tokens during life, so it pleased God that these should again appear at his death; for as the hangman was casting him off, he clasped to his bosom the crucifix—that emblem of mercy by which they had just been assured of Divine pardon. This made the populace all the more certain of his salvation, just as it filled them with compassion for his untimely death.

Never was there a greater concourse of people at an execution in Rome, nor is there recollection of a case which formed so universal a subject of conversation. Some defended the Comparini, on the ground that they had received ill-usage; others, the Franceschini, on the point of honour; but, upon calm reflection, both were adjudged equally guilty<sup>1</sup>—except Pompilia, who, being totally ignorant of the truth, had committed no other fault than that of having consented to a marriage at the command of her mother without the knowledge of her father; and who had fled from her husband's home, under fear of death, with which she had been repeatedly and unjustly threatened.

The union of these two families had its origin in deception: on the part of the Franceschini, in the fraud as to the property which they did not possess; and on the part of the Comparini as to the birth of Pompilia, who either was not their child, or had been said not to be when she really was. The deceit of the Franceschini sprang from their greed to secure the trust-money; that of the Comparini from a desire to add to their comforts; so that everything was done contrary to what is right by both human laws and divine. Wherefore there justly followed from a bad beginning a worse end, as has been described above.

Franceschini—died there on January 26, 1399, and is the first of the name mentioned. The title, it would appear, had gone to another branch of the family.

<sup>1</sup> An interesting anticipation of the three points of view adopted by the poet in "Half Rome," "The Other Half Rome," and "Tertium Quid."





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The Murder of Pompilia

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